DIAGNOSTIC TEST BATTERIES FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF THE ENGLISH AND GERMAN VOCABULARY OF 5TH GRADERS

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The aims of this research were to validate diagnostic tests for the assessment of English and German vocabulary, to gain information about the characteristics of young learners' word knowledge and to examine the functioning of diagnostic aspects on test, task and word levels. When at the beginning of foreign language learning, students are expected to know words passively and they should directly acquire the most common words (*Nation*, 2001). Picture association is a widely used method of learning words (*de Groot* and *van Hell*, 2005). It is also applied in the assessment of vocabulary to analyse the link between word form and meaning (*Nagy*, 2004).

The assessment is based on 216 English and German words with identical word meaning, at the CEFR-level of A1 and A2, and with similar word frequency. The two test batteries consist of 54 tasks. Each task contains a simple or complex picture and four words which are true-false items. Students have to decide whether a given word fits the picture through identification or implication. Three test versions were developed using the same test construction in terms of task structure, operation and CEFR-level. Data were collected in June 2013 in two groups of students. 481 learners were in the second or third year of their foreign language studies (later: class type A), and 208 5th graders had learnt English or German in increased number of weekly classes mostly in bilingual or minority schools (later: class type B). The distributions of the English (N=497) and German (N=192) sub-samples were equal in terms of foreign language grades, attitudes and parental education.

The developed tests provide reliable information on students' vocabulary (Cronbach's α values in class type A: .76–.86 and B: .80–.94). Similar test structures in the same language resulted in equivalent tests, except for one of the English tests in class type A. In both class types achievements on the tests of the same (English or German) battery were not significantly different in terms of task structure and picture type. The identification of nouns was also easier for students than that of verbs or other words. They know words at the lower CEFR level significantly better ($p<.001$) than words at the higher level. In class type A, achievements on the English test battery were significantly higher ($p<.001$) than performances on the German test battery. Achievements on test items demanding identification of nouns and other words, and at both word levels were 3–6% higher in English tests than in German tests ($p<.01$). These differences were not significant within class type B; this means that students possess the measured basic vocabulary in both languages on the same level.

The functioning of the test batteries showed that equivalent test construction resulted in similar student achievements. The difficulty of the tasks depended on word class and level. The use of these instruments is appropriate for analysing the similarities and differences in students' vocabulary.

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